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SUBJECT: FRANCE/AFRICA - PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON NIGER,  
MADAGASCAR, SOUTH AFRICA, GUINEA, GABON

REF: DAKAR 1213

Classified By: Andrew Young, Political Counselor, reason 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Foremost among the issues keeping Presidential Africa Advisor Remi Marechaux occupied is the AQIM threat, particularly to Niger, which will not allow France to suspend military cooperation despite unhappiness with Tandja's political maneuverings -- he hopes the U.S. will act likewise. For Marechaux, Madagascar's political impasse needs to be resolved soon, but neither the AU nor SADAC is helping. South African President Zuma needs to play the role of African leader, and not limit his country's influence to its immediate neighbors. It's difficult to see a way forward in Guinea, especially if President Wade tries to mediate "a solution." France's equities there are diminishing, but perhaps negotiations on military reform could make a difference. Gabon's opposition leaders accuse France of interference in the presidential elections, and want Sarkozy to intervene. END SUMMARY.

NIGER: AQIM THREAT, THE OPPOSITION'S NEXT STEPS  
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12. (C) During a September 22 lunch with Africa Watcher, Presidential Africa Advisor Remi Marechaux (please protect) assessed as very real the threat of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) expanding its activity into Niger. France is looking for ways to sanction President Tandja over his recent manipulations of the constitution, but Marechaux added that France "would not and could not" pull back on its military cooperation due to the worrying security situation in the country. He said he hoped the U.S. would also stay engaged to help with Niger's security, and also share information on threats. He explained that some French installations, indicating uranium extraction activities by French firm AREVA, are at risk of terrorist attacks, especially in the north. In Marechaux's opinion, France has "been lucky so far" that its interests and citizens have not been successfully targeted by AQIM, apart from the four French who have been killed in Mauritania and the recent suicide bombing there.

13. (C) Regarding the political situation in Niger, Marechaux is very disappointed in the opposition's lack of cohesion and strategy. He has spoken to a number of opposition leaders, who seem to believe that France and others should step in to remove Tandja, and barring that, they seem to be counting on the political and social situation to deteriorate enough that the military has to take over. Incredulous, Marechaux asked, "how can they expect us to support a policy of encouraging a military coup?" For Marechaux the planned September 26 opposition rally in Niamey will be revelatory. If less than 10,000 anti-Tandja demonstrators take to the street, "it's game over," Tandja wins. If the Nigeriens cannot get

motivated to turn out in mass (Marechaux mentioned 100,000 people), as happened in Madagascar, how can the opposition leaders expect to generate a real domestic movement to change the status quo, let alone rally international support? Marechaux added that France and others cannot care more about democracy in Niger than the country's own citizens.

MADAGASCAR: PROGRESS NEEDED SOON BEFORE IT TURNS UGLY

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¶4. (C) Marechaux is also worried about the situation in Madagascar, where he believes that without significant progress on implementing the Maputo Agreements things could turn much worse at any time -- including civil unrest, a military coup, or even assassination attempts on political leaders. If there is a new consensus government in place, presidential elections should happen soon -- not 15 months out, according to Marechaux. He feels that even now certain technical steps should be taken to prepare for elections, such as an independent assessment of the validity of the 2006 voter registration lists, and an inventory of the physical polling supplies available. Should an acceptable transitional government be established, with progress towards elections, Marechaux hopes that Madagascar can regain its AGOA benefits during the interim months.

¶5. (C) In Marechaux's opinion, neither SADC nor the African Union is playing an effective role in moving the political process forward. They are too willing to allow an extended calendar for "next steps," for example, not holding an International Contact Group (ICG) meeting since August 9. He pointed out that African organizations and high level envoys talk about taking the lead in resolving conflicts on the

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continent, but then don't do enough to actually achieve solutions.

¶6. (C) Marechaux's added that the AU, in particular, is poorly staffed and overextended. It does not have effective working-level staff and instead is populated by "too many former ministers who don't want to actually work." Marechaux noted the example of the European Union's recent overture to the AU for a broad new bilateral cooperation agreement, which the AU declined to accept, citing its own capacity constraints.

¶7. (C) (Note: Marechaux mentioned that he would likely be meeting former president Albert Zafy "soon" in Paris and that he would likely join International Cooperation Minister Joyandet at the October 6 ICG. End note.)

SOUTH AFRICA: GET IN THE GAME

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¶8. (C) France has long been working on improving its political and commercial ties with South Africa, a task complicated by the poor relations between Former Presidents Chirac and Mbeki (due mostly, according to Marechaux, to Chirac's unwelcome efforts to treat Mbeki in the same overly familiar and paternalistic style he maintained with many other African heads of state). But President Sarkozy's outreach to Zuma even before the May elections created good will within the current government.

¶9. (C) While bilateral ties are improving (including a new Renault car factory in South Africa), Marechaux was quite critical of South Africa's lack of leadership in tackling African political problems. Mbeki and now Zuma appear to be concerned only with their "neighborhood" but should be playing a positive role in conflicts outside of Southern Africa. A strong South African voice on the political crisis in Niger and Guinea would be very welcome. Marechaux stated that Zuma does not have a strong foreign policy team in place.

GUINEA: WHAT NEXT STEPS?

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¶10. (C) Marechaux stated that there is no clear way forward in Guinea or to assure that CNDD President Dadis Camara sticks to his promise to not run for President. He is worried that Senegal's President Wade will step-in to "mediate" some solution that would provide diplomatic cover, at least among African countries, for Dadis to remain in power for a long transition period, at a minimum. Marechaux added that Wade is motivated by his abiding interest in winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

¶11. (C) According to Marechaux, France does not have many equities in Guinea, or much influence. One idea he is ruminating on to regain traction on transitioning the CNDD out of office is to negotiate significant new international support for reforming and improving Guinea's military as an incentive for the military to stop its support of Dadis and accept elections. However, Marechaux added that France does not have money to support such a program. He stated France can find additional funds to address a growing threat by AQIM, but not for Guinea.

GABON: "IT'S FRANCE'S FAULT - FIX IT"

¶12. (C) On Gabon, Marechaux said that he "patiently and respectfully" has been meeting many representatives of the losing parties from the August 30 presidential elections, whom he said frequently blame France for Ali Bongo's victory -- even going so far as to claim that French intelligence agents staffed every polling station. Marechaux related that he told the Gabonese one could admit there were minor irregularities in the vote; but that even a few thousand votes would not have changed the outcome. Based on his discussions, it is clear to Marechaux that the opposition parties have no interest in creating a coalition in order to take advantage of their combined 59 percent vote tally. He said he also explained honestly that France did not have "vital interests" in Gabon that would motivate an effort to manipulate the election -- its oil imports from Gabon are relatively small, France's foreign investment is much greater in other African countries, and it is Gabon, not France that is demanding the French military base stays. For Marechaux, the opposition parties in Gabon are similar to opposition groups in other places in Africa -- they don't want to do the hard work to gain power, and instead want France to intervene

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on their behalf.

BIOGRAPHIC COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) Marecheaux has been one of Sarkozy's main Africa advisors for two years, along with Romain Serman (see reftel for our most recent discussion with Serman) and their boss, Deputy Diplomatic Advisor and chief Africa Advisor Bruno Joubert. Marechaux expects to be posted to Africa in 2010, most likely as an Ambassador. He studied Swahili at university and spent time in east Africa before joining the MFA at which time he was posted to Dar es Salaam. Before 2007, aside from a short stint working on cooperation issues, he was one of the DAS-equivalents at the MFA, under Joubert (who is now transiting to become France's Ambassador to Morocco, replaced at the Presidency by Andre Parant). Earlier in his career, Marechaux was DCM in Bangui. He also was an exchange diplomat at the Department for one year and then AF-Watcher at France's Washington Embassy.

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